

Viewpoint on Manufacturing:

Covey's 2nd Quadrant

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Do you recall Stephen Covey's 3rd Habit ⁱ ?

The Third Habit is to “Put First Things First”. That is to do the things first that are important to achieving your goals and, for the purposes of this discussion, the goals for your company. Some activities and tasks are absolutely necessary to complete, some are a total waste of time, and some are in the middle. Covey categorizes all tasks into four categories as illustrated by this matrix:

	Urgent	Not-Urgent
Important	Quadrant I (Critical)	Quadrant II (Change)
Not Important	Quadrant III (Interruptions)	Quadrant IV (Time Wasters)

The time wasters are in Quadrant IV, the unimportant and not really urgent. The kinds of activities in this quadrant do not add value to the company. They could be just busy work, un-necessary phone calls or email. You want to work to avoid or eliminate activities in this quadrant.

On the other hand in Quadrant I, are the truly important activities that are critical to the operation of your company which if they don't get done on a timely basis can impact the health of your company. Such activities would include on-time shipments and billings, fire-fighting problems, payroll, et cetera. These you cannot ignore when they require attention.

Quadrant III on the other-hand are those activities that make themselves urgent, requiring immediate attention, but are not really important to meeting the goals for your company. Many interruptions and phone calls fall into this category. Many of the 7 Wastes targeted for elimination by Lean Practices could be thought of in this

category. They too demand attention because they are part of the way the company is run, but in the end, they are wasteful, and the company would be better off if they were eliminated.

That leaves Quadrant II, the Important but Not Urgent. These are the activities of change. They are the activities of planning and improvement. They frequently get pushed aside in the rush to handle the Urgent and Important activities. However, your company will ultimately be at risk if they are continually overlooked. Such activities may include working to eliminate the Quadrant III and IV activities, implementing an improvement program for the plant or sales or the back-office, doing a strategic plan; or putting a Balanced Scorecard in place. These activities of Quadrant II are those that enable you to proactively move your company forward from the status-quo.

Then how do you get the activities of Quadrant II done ?

Almost nothing happens without some up-front effort, even if the effort is just to plan how to do something. This upfront effort necessarily will put an extra demand for the time of those involved, but thereafter other resources can often be employed.

For instance, spending time to significantly reduce the activities occurring in Quadrant IV will free up time to work on the activities of Quadrant II. Likewise, developing an efficient way to handle the interruptions and wastes associated with Quadrant III will also free up time and resources.

Of course, another way is to engage external resources, consultants or temporary employees, to assist in the planning and/or the execution of a plan. If the planned activities will enable your company to move forward from the status-quo, the cost of these external resources should ultimately be covered by the improved financial condition of your company.

So ... What are your Quadrant II activities ?

If you have not already done so, take a few Quadrant II minutes now to identify the changes or projects that would move your company towards the goals that you have for it. Then plan some time each week to refine, prioritize and finally to take action on these activities.

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Applied Technology and Science, Inc. – Your go-to company for an Operations Facilitator

We, at Applied Technology and Science, Inc., have the experience and technical background to facilitate the Quadrant II activities for your Production Operations. Our facilitator will ...

- Quickly come up to speed in a situation,
- Work with people at all levels in an organization,
- Gather, structure and analyze data into actionable information,

- Formulate an viable action plan,
- Organize, motivate and lead groups of people to achieve the desired results, and
- Work as an Individual Contributor in both Technical and non-Technical areas where necessary.

And, if we don't have the specific skills or expertise needed by your situation, we can find the expert who does. Visit our website at www.appliedtechnsci.com to explore our background, see what our clients have said about us. Then give us a call at 610-850-2769 or send us an email to dhavas@appliedtechnsci.com

ⁱ Covey, Stephen R., The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, ©1989, Simon & Schuster Inc., New York, New York, ISBN 0-671-66398-4.